

Erie County Fire Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

October 27, 2005

Call to Order & Opening Prayer

Roll Call:

Chairman Gerald Wittington	Present	Co-Chairman Douglas Larkin	Present
Sec./Treasurer John Wicka	Present	Dennis Allen	Present
Bruce Atkins	Present	Charles Bethge	Present
William Boldt	Present	Daniel Carrier	Present
Todd Catalano	Present	James Carr	Present
Donald Connolly	Present	Michael D'Orazio	Absent
Keith Dillingham	Absent	Michael Gates	Excused
Dennis Gibbs	Absent	Christopher Higgins	Excused
Daniel Kamman	Present	James Lawida	Present
Richard Litfin	Present	Richard Mariani	Excused
Robert Mueller	Present	Edward Saturnus	Present
Tony Schueckler	Present	Charles Stewart	Excused
William G Szewc	Present		

Reading of Minutes of Previous Meeting: The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and a motion was made by D Carrier, seconded by W G Szewc to accept as presented. The motion was duly voted on and carried.

Reading of Correspondence: The correspondence was read and those items needing further attention were held for either old or new business. It was noted that letters of appointment or reappointment were still outstanding from Buffalo, Angola, Helmuth and City of Tonawanda. Chairman Whittington requested that these letters get in soon so the appointment process can be wrapped up.

Officer Reports:

Chairman's Report: The Chairman reported he attended a meeting with the Drill Tower Committee and the Amherst Chiefs Tower committee.

Co-Chairman's Report: He indicated that the incident involving the Cheektowaga tower will be discussed in the Deputy Commissioner's report.

Secretary's Report: J Wicka advised he is working on copying all the minutes back to 1990 into PDF files for archival purposes and will have a complete set for anyone who wants one at the end of 2005.

Commissioner's & Committee Reports

Commissioner's Report: T Schmittendorf reported on behalf of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. He briefed on the following information:

- M Walters and J McCullough apologized for not being in attendance as they are both out of town on business. Mike is in Albany for SWN and Jim is at Montour Falls for the Regional Training Coordinators conference.
- The information and the model numbers for the 800 MHz radios are expected to be out soon for those departments who were awarded FEMA grants to purchase radios. Tiger is working with those departments who need extensions on grant dates to get the extensions.
- The Cheektowaga tower had over 800 training events since 1/1/05. This is significant due to the fact that the tower was closed for a period of time due to the county budget. The county and state instructors have been very busy over the last several months.
- He is soliciting for winter training course requests and he has received a few so far. He wants to get all requests into the state by close of business on 10/28. He anticipates a pool of about 300 hours are remaining and will try and get more allocated if the need arises. He encouraged all to go back to their Chief's organizations and encourage the departments to put their requests in ASAP.
- Looking to do another hay run before the end of the season. Looking to have at least the Cheektowaga tower open as long as possible. He anticipates some cancellations may occur due to the weather.

- He has struck up a working relationship with Lowe's Home Improvements. They donate equipment and supplies based on surplus materials or items no longer useable for them. He is using the materials to build or rebuild training assets.
- There was an incident on October 10 at the Cheektowaga Live Burn building during a Firefighter 1 class whereby state instructors did not allegedly follow the proper safety and operating guidelines. The incident resulted in damage to the facilities and minor injuries to some of the attendees. The matter is being investigated by OFPC and EC Fire Safety. When the investigation is complete it is expected a full report will be made. Due to the incident, the live burn building is closed and not usable. They are looking what need to be done to get the building back up and running. There was a brief discussion as to who is liable for the damage and who will pay for it and Tiger advised it is highly doubtful that the state will take on that responsibility. After a lengthy discussion, T Schuekler made a motion that until the matter is resolved and fully investigated and a report made, that the two instructors not be allowed to teach any scheduled courses. The motion was under question. C Bethge spoke about information and reports he received from the parties involved in the incident. He stated that the attitude of the instructors was not acceptable and left much to be desired. We need to make them understand the seriousness of the situation and also, that the actions of the instructors was not part of accepted protocols and policies. D Carrier questioned how many weeks were remaining in the FF1 course and it was determined there are two. The discussion continued and it was discussed if the motion should be amended to have these two instructors removed from teaching the rest of this course. T Schuekler recommended that the county supplement the replaced instructors for the last two weeks of the course. Tiger agreed this should happen as they normally attend these sessions to act as safety officers. T Schuekler amended his motion and the second to the motion was amended by D Larkin to recommend suspension of the lead instructor from this course pending a complete investigation and receipt and approval of the report by the FAB. The motion was duly voted on and carried.

Deputy Commissioner's Report: Covered above.

School Committee: T Schuekler reported on the following:

- There is an issue with county instructors not being notified by department chiefs prior to a scheduled evolution to discuss training needs to be covered at the evolution. This would help the instructors prepare for the training evolution.
- There was a discussion about the policy of the number of members from a host company attending a training which is currently no more than four from the host company able to attend a FF1 course. T Schuekler made a motion, seconded by W G Swecz, to amend the policy to allow no more than 50% of attendees being from the host company. The issue came under question and discussed was a recent course where members from the host company were totally denied. Tiger explained this was due to the late filing of applications for the cost by host company members. After the question, the motion was duly voted on and carried.
- There was a question by Chairman Whittington if Hamburg Fire Department was appointed as an "Erie County Regional Training Center". He reported that they are using this designation in their FEMA grant applications. He also questioned if they will be allowed to charge a fee to outside departments who use their recently acquired facility obtained by FEMA funds. Tiger explained that they were given approval to use the terminology as they were hosting FF1 courses over this last summer. C Whittington made a motion, seconded by D Larkin to send a letter to Hamburg advising them to no longer use the terminology "Erie County Regional Training Facility". The motion was under question by J. Wicka who stated his opposition to the motion. After the question, the motion was duly voted on and carried with one voice opposition.
- D Allen reported that Highland Hose has been requesting a pump operators course but continues to be denied approval. Tiger explained that the members they want to put into the course have not met prerequisites of the course, that being EVOC training. Tiger advised they will be considered for scheduling in the spring of 2006.

Drill Towers Committee: W Szewc reported on the following:

- Recommended that a structural engineer look at the live burn building to determine the exact damage. Tiger advised this was going to be done.
- Regarding prior reported damage at Chestnut Ridge, he reviewed use reports and found that the damage most likely was done sometime between 9/1 and 9/14/05.
- The Amherst Tower appears to being used as a class 1 live burn building and damage is occurring. Cushions and other debris are being used for burning. The 3rd floor wall was damaged as a result of the burning. Tiger advised reports have been turn in reporting the damages found. There was a question if

can be determined by the reports who is burning at that location based on the evolutions being conducted. Tiger advised that conditions and activities are reported by check boxes on the reports and it may be possible to determine use and activity. W G Szewc advised that trying to pinpoint cause is difficult. Tiger advised that the problems could be monitored if instructors were more perceptive but sometimes that is difficult to do. They need to stick to proper protocols and policies and burn only in the burn barrels. A motion was then made by T Schuekler, seconded by D Larkin, to have Tiger send a letter to all instructors reinforcing the safety policies and training protocols. The motion was duly voted on and carried.

- **Amherst Training Tower Proposal:** W G Szewc advised that the committee met with the Amherst Committee and he asked J Lawida to report out on the meeting. J Lawida distributed the revised proposal (attached) and advised one of the major changes made was that with the proposed user fee. A lengthy discussion followed which included a full review of the revised proposal. After the discussion, D Larkin made a motion, seconded by D Connolly, that the Fire Advisory Board approve the proposal and recommend that negotiations with the county begin to allow the purchase of the facility to the Amherst/Clarence/Newsted Chiefs. The motion came under question.
 - J Wicka recommended that the entire issue of county fire training facilities be looked at and instead of doing a “piece meal” approach, we should look at this as a larger and long-term plan. In doing this, all 3 facilities could be looked at and we should seek comments from all entities in the fire service about this. He stated he is not opposed to the Amherst proposal but felt that more could be accomplished in the long run if we do not take quick action on this issue and address other issues that could play into this decision down the road.
 - C Bethge suggested that D Larkin should not have made the motion to recommend approval of the plan as he represents a major stakeholder and it could be looked at as a conflict of interest. He also stated that the consideration for a long-term and broader approach to these issues should be turned over to the drill tower committee.
 - As a result of C. Bethge’s suggestion on the motion, D Larkin withdrew his motion and it was instead introduced by D Carrier. The second remained the same. D Carrier also stated that we should move forward on this and not oppose the proposal.
 - J Lawida stated the FAB will continue to have recommendations in the process and operating of the Amherst facility. We can use this proposal and this facility to make it better for all firefighters. No one will be prevented from using the tower.
 - T Schmittendorf suggested the proposal be presented to all organizations and the general fire service population so we can learn how everyone feels about this. We should consider accepting written comments.
 - G Whittington advised he would like to see this proposal as a starting point to developing a long-term master plan. Possibly a 5 to 20 year plan. We can also modify the proposed motion to have it read that we approve it for further negotiations.
 - At that point the question was moved and a roll call vote was taken with the following results: D Allen – No; B Atkins – Yes; C Bethge – No; W Boldt – No; J Carr – No; D Carrier – Yes; D Connolly – Yes; T Catalano – No; D Kamann – Yes; D Larkin – Yes; J Lawida – Yes; R Litfin – Yes; R Mueller – Yes; E Saturnus – Yes; T Schuekler – Yes; W Szewc – Yes; J Wicka – No; G Whittington – No. The motion was approved with 11 Yes, 7 No.

Radio Committee: Chairman Whittington reported on the following:

- 800 MHz is moving forward and is on a “fast-track” with the SWN. It is anticipated that radios may begin to be distributed within the next 15 months from September 2005. A brief discussion followed with the benefits of the program being reviewed again.
- The move to digital alerting continues to move forward and it is anticipated that the build-out would be about 52 weeks. Anticipated completion date is November 2006.

Legislation & Fire Prevention: R Mariani reported through an e-mail that there was nothing new to report.

Budget & Wall of Fame: Chairman Whittington reviewed the motion approved at the last meeting. He continues to speak and work with the committee on developing criteria for selection to the wall.

Rules & Mutual Aid: J Carr presented his recommended revisions to the county mutual plan based on changes in operations and structures in the fire service (see attached).

There was a discussion as to what effect the impending retirement of Commissioner Walters would have on the structure of Department of Emergency Services. It was decided that at this point it was too early to tell what the impact would be but steps should be taken within the short time ahead to try and meet with the parties

who will be deciding how the department would function and be structured after a merge with Central Police Services. G Whittington advised he would look into trying to set up a meeting with the required entities to try and learn more about this.

It was also stated that the mutual aid policy and radio policy may be stored on computer disk and we will try and locate that in order to make it easier to make the recommended changes.

Erie County Chiefs: W Boldt reported on the following:

- The next meeting is Nov 14 @ Lake View. This is election night. He will seek comments on the Amherst proposal to bring back to this board.
- Has not heard of any update to the transfer of the training funds from the state to the county. He has heard this may occur anytime from late November to January.

Erie County Vol. Firemen's Assoc.: D Carrier reported on the following:

- Brian Donohue was elected as a new director.
- The FAB Chairman will be receiving an invitation to their annual installation.
- The merger of Emergency Services with Central Police Services was opposed by this organization.
- The FASNY Legislative weekend in Albany is 10/28 to 10/30.
- May 13, 2006 is the Response to Terrorism school at the fire academy.

Fire District Officers: C Bethge reported the next meeting is 12/21 at Reserve.

Fire Police: B Atkins reported on the following:

- Danny Wagner from Evans Center was elected as the new president.
- A Fire Police school is set for 4/24/06 at Big Tree.

Old Business

Radio Policies: J Wicka advised he distributed copies of the radio message policy to those who requested a copy.

Consolidation and Merger of ES and CPS: G Whittington advised that it appears that in order for this to happen the county charter would need to be changed. ES would not be under CPS but an equal partner with them. He said we should look at this move with an open mind and he will have a positive perspective when looking at this proposal. He said the fire service certainly should have a voice in the proposal and it may be premature to oppose the proposal without knowing all the details. We should invite Commissioner Commerford to a meeting to discuss the proposal and try and learn more information. He will reach out to him for further discussion.

Public Safety Campus: G Whittington reported some county departments have been moved into the new campus. Visits to view the new center are being allowed but may be restricted. There are rumors being circulated about the county talking to some municipalities about taking over dispatch services. He advised that recent talks with the Town of Boston were initiated by the town and not the county. This stemmed from an earlier joint meeting of town supervisors.

New Business

Erie County Mutual Aid Plan: This was covered in the committee report.

Retirement Party for Commissioner Walters: T Schmittendorf reported that a party will be held on 12/1/05 at Evans Center. More information will be forthcoming.

November & December Meetings: The next meetings were set for the following dates: Thursday November 17 and December 15.

Fire Instructor Scheduling: B Mueller asked for a clarification on who is doing state and county fire instructor scheduling. T Schmittendorf advised that Deputy Commissioner McCullough schedules county instructors and he schedules state instructors. Mueller advised that this was different from what he heard was coming from the commissioner's office. Schmittendorf assured this is accurate.

W G Szewc advised that instructors are having difficulty getting information on course scheduling. It was decided that they need to collectively discuss this with Deputy Commissioner McCullough. T Schmittendorf also advised that this issue was discussed with the instructors at a meeting back in September.

Treasurer's Report: J Wicka reported a new net worth of \$458.24

Adjournment

With no further business to conduct, a motion was made by W G Szewc, seconded by D Connolly, to adjourn the meeting at 10:25. The motion was duly voted on and carried.

Respectfully submitted
John R. Wicka
Secretary/Treasurer